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CIA Aids Opium Traffic

by Frank Browning and Banning Garrett

(Editor's note: The following article has been made available to subscribers of College Press Service prior to its release nationally because of CPS's involvement in the story's inception.)

Sandwiched between the president's State of the World message, in which he announced an all-out campaign to halt the world's opium traffic, the Laotian invasion, and this spring's growing anti-war protests, the story is an explosive one. Sen. George McGovern and Rep. Ronald Dellums are both pressing for hearings in Congress on the U.S. government's complicity with world opium trade, and details on these and other subsequent developments will follow in other stories.)

"Mr. President, the specter of heroin addiction is haunting nearly every community in this nation." With these urgent words, Senator Vance Hartke spoke up on March 2 in support of a resolution on drug control being considered in the U.S. Senate. Estimating that there are 500,000 heroin addicts in the U.S., he pointed out that nearly 20 per cent of them are teenagers. The concern of Hartke and others is not misplaced. Heroin has become the major killer of young people between 18 and 35, outpacing death from accidents, suicides or cancer. It has also become a major cause of crime: to sustain their habits, addicts in the U.S. spend more than \$15 million a day, half of it coming from the 55 per cent of crime in the cities which they commit and the annual \$2.5 billion worth of goods they steal.

Once safely isolated as part of the destructive funkiness of the black ghetto, heroin has suddenly spread out into Middle America, becoming as much a part of suburbia as the Saturday barbecue. This has

gained it the attention it otherwise never would have had. President Nixon himself says it is spreading with "pandemic virulence." People are becoming aware that teenagers are shooting up at lunchtime in schools and returning to classrooms to nod the day away. But what they don't know--and what no one is telling them--is that neither the volcanic eruption of addiction in this country nor the crimes it causes would be possible without the age-old international trade in opium (from which heroin is derived), or that heroin addiction--like inflation, unemployment, and most of the other chaotic forces in American society today--is directly related to the U.S. war in Indochina.

The connection between war and opium in Asia is as old as empire itself. But the relationship has never been so symbiotic, so intricate in its networks and so vast in its implications. Never before has the trail of tragedy been so clearly marked as in the present phase of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. For the international traffic in opium has expanded in lockstep with the expanding U.S. military presence there, just as heroin has stalked the same young people in U.S. high schools who will also be called on to fight that war. The ironies that have accompanied the war in Vietnam since its onset are more poignant than before. At the very moment that public officials are wringing their hands over the heroin problem, Washington's own Cold War crusade, replete with clandestine activities that would seem far-fetched even in a spy novel, continues to play a major role in a process that has already rerouted the opium traffic from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and is every day opening new channels for its shipment to the U.S. At the same time the government starts

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